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## FAMILY TIES

# When Parents Don't Share Values

BY SUSAN E. MURAY

All Christian parents want their children to grow in faith, but what can you do when the other household is leading the sheep away from the Shepherd? Ron Deal, an active minister who strengthens stepfamilies, suggests that even though a parent's temptation to limit contact between her children and their father is understandable, becoming a barrier between the other biological parent and their children is not recommended. When this happens, he says, children grow to resent the parent who blocks parental access. Also, the ex-spouse often feels cheated and may retaliate, exposing children to even more conflict.

There is hope in considering these suggestions:

**Admit that you can't control what is taught or demonstrated in the other home.** Many people try and try to change their ex-spouse for years and years. You may want to think of it this way: if you couldn't change your spouse while you were married, how do you think you can change them in your divorce? Instead, let God be in control of what you can't change, and make the most of your time with your children.

**Influence your children toward the Lord while they are in your home.** Think of it as an inoculation. In medical terms, an inoculation is when a virus is injected in a controlled way to allow the body to develop antibodies that can combat a live virus. Deal suggests that spiritual inoculations present viewpoints that oppose the word of God and then teach Bible concepts that help children combat them. For example, discussing a TV program that glorifies greed and then showing children a spiritual view of money and stewardship is a way to inoculate them for future decisions.

Children who have one parent not living a Christian life will need inoculations to help them deal with an environment that is hostile to their growing faith. It is critical, however, that you remain neutral about the other parent; the inoculation cannot be a personal attack. Comments that pull on children's loyalties and burden them with your hostilities will diminish your influence as they react defensively against your negativity.

**You may have to endure years of prodigal living as your children try out the values of the other home.** This is a truth that many parents fear. Children may make the choice to experiment with the "easier, less demanding" lifestyle of the other home, especially during the teen years when they are deciding whether the faith they've been handed down (inherited faith) will become their own (owned faith). "Lovingly admonish them toward the Lord, not away from the other parent; and be close enough when they repent," suggests Deal.

**Pray daily for the strength to walk in the light, and introduce your children to Jesus at each and every opportunity.** Your model is a powerful bridge to their personal commitment to Christ. Do all you can do to take your kids by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master (Ephesians 6:4).

**Children have a natural inclination to listen to stories.** Tell your children, and your stepchildren, your faith story, including how you came to know Christ, how your faith has had peaks and valleys, and the influence of other people in your life. Let them see and hear how God has worked in your life.

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Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.

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Adapted from Family Ministry Connection, Family Information Services, Minneapolis, Minn. (2002), a website no longer active.

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Visit [www.successfulstepfamilies.com](http://www.successfulstepfamilies.com), a support website for parents.

